

NEWS RELEASE

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE AND INTERAGENCY PARTNERS CONTINUE WORK ON BISON - ELK MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR NATIONAL ELK REFUGE AND NEIGHBORING PARK LANDS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and their cooperating and partner agencies are making progress on the Bison/Elk Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the National Elk Refuge and Grand Teton National Park and John D. Rockefeller Jr., Memorial Parkway in northwestern Wyoming.

The agencies have started the interagency review process, in which the agencies will work together to refine and revise the plan and the EIS. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and National Park Service, along with the USDA Forest Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Wyoming Fish and Game Department, hope to complete this process by spring, 2005, at which point a draft plan and EIS will be released to the public for comment. The final plan and EIS is expected to be completed by late 2006.

The bison/elk management planning process began in 1999 following earlier litigation over a bison management plan prepared by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Park Service for the refuge and the park and parkway. The court ordered that no destruction of bison could occur on refuge or park lands until the agencies analyzed bison management in combination with the winter feeding program on the refuge. The agencies ultimately broadened the scope of the analysis to include elk management in order to meet National Wildlife Refuge System planning requirements and to address the issues related to high animal concentrations and effects on habitat all at the same time.

The National Elk Refuge, a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System, is located in northwestern Wyoming, just north of Jackson, Wyoming. The refuge consists of 25,000 acres, including nearly 1600 acres of open water, and provides winter range for more than 7,500 elk and habitat for 47 different mammals and 175 species of birds.

Grand Teton National Park, a unit of the National Park System, is located in northwestern Wyoming, just north and west of Jackson, Wyoming. The park consists of 309,995 acres of diverse habitats, ranging from sagebrush to the high mountain peaks of the Teton Range, and supports a variety of native wildlife, including elk and bison, as well as pronghorn antelope. Nearly 4 million people visit the park annually. The plan and EIS will also address bison and elk management issues on the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway, a 23,777-acre link between the park and Yellowstone National Park.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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